

The Dunster (Harvard University, Dudley Hall)  
Dunster Street  
Cambridge  
Middlesex County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-818

HABS  
MASS,  
9-CAMB,  
45-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

|  |   |                               |
|--|---|-------------------------------|
| STATE<br>Massachusetts   | COUNTY<br>Middlesex   | TOWN OR VICINITY<br>Cambridge |
| HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME)<br>The Dunster  |   | HABS NO.<br>MA-818            |
| SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE<br>Harvard University, Dudley Hall  |   |                               |
| COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES)<br>Dunster Street, east side  |   |                               |
| DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE)<br>1895-97   | ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)<br>Little, Brown, and Moore (see continuation page A) |                               |
| SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE)<br>Built as a privately owned student dormitory for New Yorker John Albro Little. Acquired by Harvard University at Little's death in 1918, and renamed Dudley Hall in 1930. A particularly fine illustration of the privately financed, prestige (see continuation page B) |   |                               |
| STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)<br>American Renaissance   |   |                               |
| MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS)  |   |                               |
| SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE)<br>Five stories  |   |                               |
| EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE<br>See continuation page C.  |   |                               |
| INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)<br>See continuation page D.  |   |                               |
| MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES<br>1935: alterations by Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbott.   |   |                               |
| PRESENT CONOITION AND USE<br>Demolished January-February 1964.   |   |                               |
| OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE<br>Plans of original building in Department of Buildings and Grounds, Harvard University. This collection also includes the 1935 alteration drawings.   |   |                               |
| SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.)<br>See continuation page E.   |   |                               |
| COMPILER, AFFILIATION<br>Edited by Alison K Hoagland from undated paper by James F. O'Gorman.  |   | DATE<br>September 1984        |

A. Architects, continued

The architects were a lesser reflection of the infinitely better known McKim, Mead and White: they travelled the same path from Shingle Style to Classical Revival. Arthur Little (1852-1925) was probably the most interesting of the trio. A graduate of M.I.T. (1875), Little worked for Peabody and Stearns before striking out on his own in 1877. He formed a partnership with Herbert W. C. Browne (1860-1946) in 1889, and George A. Moore, about whom apparently little is known, joined the firm for a few years about the time the Dunster was designed. Arthur Little is best remembered now as the author-draftsman of one of the first books devoted to American colonial architecture, a symptom of the American Queen Anne, and as the designer of some rather fine Shingle style houses. (Arthur Little, Early New England Interiors: Sketches in Salem, Marblehead, Portsmouth and Kittery (Boston, 1878); V.J. Scully, Jr., The Shingle Style (New Haven and London, 1955) 104 ff., 152; and H.-R. Hitchcock, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Baltimore, 1958) 227-228, 265, 269, 446.)

B. Significance, continued

...residential quarters of wealthy Harvard undergraduates of a less democratic era, and the work of the Boston architectural firm of Little, Browne and Moore, the senior partner of which, Arthur Little, is a figure of some interest to students of American architecture.

C. Exterior features, continued

The building was a regular block bounded by flat planes of hard buff brick articulated by rather dry limestone trim and capped by a bracketed cornice. The front (west) elevation had a central recession rising its full height and dividing the facade into three parts of three bays each. The actual third story was treated externally as the piano nobile with windows above the suggestion of a continuous socle which were capped by alternating triangular and segmental pediments. The central bay here was accented by a tripartite window behind a balustraded balcony supported by robust consoles. The ground story had quoins and windows with molded frames and pronounced keystones. The actual second story became a neutral area in this scheme, a mere entresol edged above and below by a belt course. Similarly, the fourth story was accented, while the fifth pretended to be a mere attic beneath the cornice. By such visual sleight-of-hand, the architects sought to convert a college dormitory into the semblance of an urban palace.

#### D. Interior features continued

The architects followed the general Renaissance palazzo paradigm in planning the Dunster: the living suites were reached from corridors wrapped around three sides of an inner cortile which here rose in four tiers from the second floor to a full-size skylight. Each of these tiers had a different architectural system (Doric pier and lintel below, Ionic pier and arch at the second tier, then an Ionic colonnade surmounted by a Corinthian one) so that the total visual effect was of a stack of four discrete layers joined by the rising verticals of the supports. The voids between these supports were partially filled with curved and patterned cast-iron railings, the curve becoming less pronounced at each higher tier, which seemed related to the Art Nouveau without actually being Art Nouveau in detail. These railings formed the woof within the tapestry of the court architecture: their sinuous, horizontal undulations posed a visual foil to the vertical, rectilinear geometry of the superimposed orders. On the south side of the court, where the corridor was lacking, these railings curved out toward the center of the well and butted against the buff brick exterior wall without connecting. The area of wall within these S-curved "balconies" was again punctuated by a different device at each level: a Palladian window below, a rectangular, eared frame which bore the name of the building and the date MDCCCXCV at the second tier, a pedimented window above this, and finally, an oeil-de-boeuf. Flooded with light from above, and surrounded by the twilight space of the corridor, the court formed the principal architectural attraction of the building, a particularly airy and spacious internal focus for the peripheral apartments, and by present standards, a conspicuous "waste" of rentable floor area.

The apartments themselves were equally generous, for the Dunster was intended to appeal to Harvard's economic and social elite. The entire block contained only thirty-three units, and typical of all of these "Gold Coast" dormitories, each included two bedrooms, bath, and a large study graced by an opulent, and usually somewhat gawky, chimney piece, no two alike.

#### E. Sources of Information continued

Boston Architectural Club Year Book (Boston, 1912), n.p. Salem Bank.

Education, Bricks and Mortar (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), 62.

Greene, J. D., "Harvard in the '90s," in B. Atkinson, ed., College in a Yard (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 77-80.

Harvard University Handbook (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), 169.

Mitchell, S., ed., Official Guide to Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), 120-121.

Morison, S. E., Three Centuries of Harvard (Cambridge, Mass., 1936; fifth printing, 1946) 418 ff.

Whitehill, W. M., Boston: a Topographical History (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), 182.